



Public Works Utilities

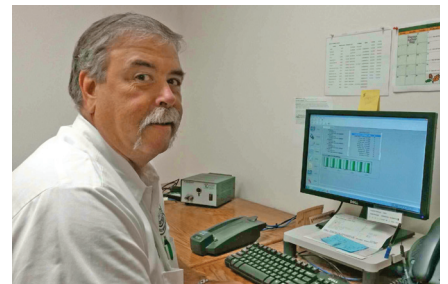
50+ Years with Neptune and Building on a Decade of R900® Technology

MOVING FORWARD WITH A RELATIONSHIP THAT GOES WAY BACK

Division Manager Dwile Weagel has spent 26 years working with the Public Works Utilities (PWU) of Billings, Montana. Field Supervisor Mark Holmes has worked with them for 30 years. You'd have to add their tenures together to equal the time that Neptune Technology Group has worked with Billings' Public Works Utilities – beginning that partnership with water meters back in the 1950s and as an early adopter of Neptune's ARB® absolute encoder meter reading technology in the 1960s. Weagel gives the reason for the longevity of the relationship, "The quality of their technology and meters has been very high, and the customer service we get from them and [Neptune® distributor] Northwest Pipe Fittings has been very, very good."

The PWU read its water meters manually until 1992 when it installed telephone-type meter interface units (MIUs). After customers began switching from landline to cellular phones, Weagel and his team began implementing R900® radio frequency (RF) MIUs in May 2003, using handhelds first and then the MRX920™ mobile data collector to get the meter readings. In a short period of time, Billings no longer needed its two full-time meter reading positions. As of August 2010, the City's 30,644 services have been entirely read using R900 RF technology.

In 2012, Weagel began talking with Neptune District Manager Tony Glassier about implementing R900® Gateway fixed network data collectors. "Instead of one reading per month, we wanted to collect multiple meter readings every day to be able to help customers who might have leaks or excessive water consumption." Now, with installation of the R900 Gateways 88 percent complete, the PWU can collect 94 percent of its readings without rolling a truck. And while the City is still "fine tuning" the system, as Weagel puts it, its customers are already reaping the benefits of more frequent readings. "Leaks



CUSTOMER

Public Works Utilities,
Billings Montana

SERVICE TERRITORY

Public Works Utilities serves 30,644
services in southern Montana.

SOLUTION BENEFITS

Fixed network using R900 Gateways

Saved over 50 work orders
per month

Cut read time by half to 6 hours

Multiple daily reads to
help customers monitor
water consumption

are found faster,” he said. “We can tell customers when the problems started, and they realize they had company at the time they didn’t remember, or that’s when professional sprinkler services came by. Neptune has helped us help the customer.”

CUSTOMER SERVICE IS ON A ROLL – WITHOUT THE TRUCKS

It’s not just for the regular meter readings that Billings is saved from sending out utility vehicles. The same has applied to off-cycle reads. “When a tenant moves out and the water goes back under the landlord’s name, we used to have to roll out a truck,” said Holmes. “We don’t anymore, and that’s saved us 50 work orders a month.”

According to Holmes, the transition to fixed network has been very smooth. Weagel agreed, saying, “We’ve found Neptune technology to be backward compatible with different types of reading systems.” The R900 Gateways work just as easily with the PWU’s host software, encoders, and MIUs as the MRX920 and the handheld units that came before. In fact, personnel still use mobile reading as a backup method, with handhelds in reserve to collect re-reads or to double check RF signals before leaving an MIU installation site.

And although the focus of migrating to fixed network reading has been to roll fewer service trucks and improve customer service, the City has nonetheless cut the number of hours per week it reads by half, from 12 to just six.

NEVER ANY QUESTION ABOUT WHERE TO GET THE ANSWERS

What’s next for the Public Works Utilities’ R900 System? “After we add the last R900 Gateway, we’ll continue fine tuning so that we’ll be able to read every meter through the fixed network,” said Weagel. As part of those efforts, he’s eager to install Neptune’s latest enhanced R900 MIUs. “We’ve got some businesses downtown where the RF units are located deep within thick-walled concrete basements. “The [enhanced R900 MIU’s] 1-watt added power will help us to get those buildings’ meter readings.”

Billings, Montana has long been a satisfied Neptune utility customer and is poised for another five decades as a most valued partner. “Neptune has proven to be a solid company with quality products,” Weagel said.

Speaking to Neptune’s commitment to providing people with answers, Holmes added, “They stand behind their product no matter what – there’s never any question.”



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